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New Art of Contentment;

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ESSAY

UPON

PHILIPPIANS iv. 11.

*I have learned in whatsoever State I am there
with to be content.*

By W. WEBSTER, D. D. *Vicar of Ware*

L O N D O N:

Printed by J. EVERINGHAM and T. REYNOLDS,
in Dean-Street, Fetter-Lane.

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BA W. WEBSTER, D.D.

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Related by J. E. H. and T. R. H.

1. The first part of the document is a list of names and addresses, which appears to be a directory or a list of contacts. The names are written in a cursive script, and the addresses are listed below them. The list includes names such as "John A. Smith", "John B. Smith", "John C. Smith", "John D. Smith", "John E. Smith", "John F. Smith", "John G. Smith", "John H. Smith", "John I. Smith", "John J. Smith", "John K. Smith", "John L. Smith", "John M. Smith", "John N. Smith", "John O. Smith", "John P. Smith", "John Q. Smith", "John R. Smith", "John S. Smith", "John T. Smith", "John U. Smith", "John V. Smith", "John W. Smith", "John X. Smith", "John Y. Smith", and "John Z. Smith".

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P R E F A C E.

WHEN I published my Book upon *Prayer* and the *Sacrament*, I determined, and declared, that I would never publish any thing more, because I, really, found my slender Abilities for Writing very much impaired; my *Invention* grown quite barren; my *Imagination* quite cold.—Such Resolutions and Declarations I cannot apprehend to carry the binding Force of a *Promise*: However, the same Reasons for not attempting any thing more still subsisting, my own Character, and a decent Respect to the Publick, seem to require an Account of the Change of my Mind.—This short Discourse was drawn up some Time ago, solely for my own Use; but, having shewn the Manuscript to several private Friends, to whom I thought it might administer some Comfort, at their earnest Request I now print it, with a few *Alterations*, and *Additions*.

P R E F A C E.

I take the Liberty of calling it *The New Art of Contentment*; for, though this Subject has long ago been exhausted by the great Dr. Barrow, the Method of *Writing*, like the Practice of *Physick*, is quite altered. The *New Dispensatory* may not contain a *single Drug* but what has been in Use before, yet, the Mixtures may be quite different, and the Medicines more simple, and *therefore* the more forceable.

Such as it is, whoever shall think it worth *Six Pence* and *Half an Hour*, he is welcome to it. If he receives any Benefit from it, to God only be the *Glory*; mine, however, will be the *Pleasure*.—If the *Reader* does not receive any *Profit*, I hope the *Writer* will not receive any *Prejudice* by an unkind Construction of his Intention in any Part of it.

W. Webster.

A N
E S S A Y
O N
P H I L I P P I A N S iv. II.

*I have learned in whatsoever State I am there
with to be content.*

I have Learned.

THIS Expression implies that the Knowledge of which the Apostle here speaks, requires *Study* and *Application* in order to understand the Nature of it, and to put it in Practice.

I have learned to be Content.

This is so useful a Piece of Knowledge, that it deserves the utmost Attention of every one, let his Station and Circumstances of Life be what they will. *Common Prudence* requires this of us in order to our *present* Peace of Mind. *Religion* requires it in order to our *future* Felicity.

B

To

To be *Content*.

Whatever may be the precise, literal Meaning of the original Word, or in what Sense soever it may be used in other Places of Scripture, it is evident that *St. Paul* does not here use it in the *common* Acceptation of the Word, as it signifies being *satisfied* with our Condition, and free from any Uneasiness of Mind on that Account, because there are many Stations and Circumstances of Life wherein it is so far from being *difficult* to be *content*, in that Sense of the Word, that, without an *uncommon Perverseness* of Mind, an *unusual Restlessness* of Disposition, it is almost impossible for a Man to be otherwise than satisfied, I might say, *highly pleased* with his Condition. The Apostle mentions, particularly, a State of great *Affluence*, in Opposition to *Want*. I know, says he, how to be *abased*, and I know how to *abound*; *every where*, and in *all Things*, I am instructed both to be *full* and to be *hungry*; both to *abound*, and to suffer *Need*. By *Content*, therefore, in this Place, he must mean an *Evenness*, or *Æquanimity*, of Mind, the same Sense in which the *Latins* used the Word *Æquanimitas*, of which our *English* Word is an exact Translation. By this *Æquus Animus* they understood a Mind, *Qui nec prosperis Extollitur, nec adversis Frangitur*; a Mind that is neither *elated*, or *lifted up*, by *Prosperity*, nor *depressed* by *Adversity*. This is a noble

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Disposition, indeed; *truly manly, truly Christian*; and happy those who can attain it. But, considering what a *Variety* of Passions actuate the *human Mind*, and what Variety of Occasions there may be in the Course of *human Life*, to put those Passions in Motion, it is a *Disposition* as difficult to be acquired, a *Lesson* as hard to be learned, as it is excellent and useful; especially, in a State of *great Prosperity*. It were easy to shew, that it is much more difficult to learn how to *abound*, than how to be *abased*; how to be *full*, than how to be *hungry*. But, in this Essay, I do not intend to offer any unacceptable Observations to those who are rejoicing, perhaps, *exulting* in the Enjoyment of their good Things; such an Attempt they would, probably, look upon as an unseasonable Interruption, and an *envious Freedom*; but, I hope, they will forgive my *Charity*, if I recommend them to the Grace of God, that He would direct them to the right Use of his Blessings, and endeavour to administer some Consolation to the *Unfortunate* and *Distressed*, who are likely to be more thankful for my good Offices, though they have less Occasion for them.

But before I enter directly upon the Subject, it may be of Use rightly to state the Notion of *Trouble*; or *Affliction*, for, this may prevent, or remove, a great deal of unnecessary Uneasiness, and silence many Reflections upon Providence. If their Situation in Life be not

agreeable to their Inclinations, if any thing happens to them contrary to their fond Hopes, vain Wishes, and extravagant Desires, Men are apt to be discontented, and to quarrel with God's Dispensations. But, this I may venture to lay down for an indisputable Maxim, *viz.* that *no Station* of Life can be, in *itself*, a Station of *Affliction*; for these two plain Reasons, because *all Stations* are the Allotment of God, who is infinitely *wise* and *good* in all his Dispensations; and because different *Stations* in Life, and *Ranks* of Men, are necessary to the Good of the whole Community, and to the Exercise of *Christian Virtues*. A *particular* Station may happen to be a State of *Affliction*, but, then, this is owing to some accidental Circumstances, but does not *necessarily* arise from it. For Instance—A State of *Servitude* and *Labour*, where Persons have been *born* and *bred* to it, is not, in *itself*, a State of *Affliction*, because, notwithstanding his Circumstances, such a one may be easy in his Mind, and happy. From his *Infancy* he has been *accustomed* to his Condition; and such an *early, long* Habit renders it easy to him. To be subject to the Will of another, to *work* and *fare hard*, is become so familiar to him, that it is no Trial of his Patience and Resignation. But, suppose this Person to have been born of reputable Parents; to have been unaccustomed to laborious Offices; to have a Constitution not robust enough to bear the
 Fatigue

Fatigue of them; to have been educated in the Expectation of a better Situation, to have lived in Credit, and in the Enjoyment, not only of the *Necessaries*, but many of the *Comforts* and innocent *Pleasures* of Life; to have been used to *give*, instead of *receiving* Commands; I say, suppose a Person to be reduced from such an agreeable Situation to the Necessity of *working* for his Living; of being subject to the *arbitrary Will* of a Master, or Mistress; to be deprived of his usual agreeable Amusements, all at once; to live in a manner quite different, in all Respects, from that to which he has been, all his Life-time, accustomed; perhaps tyrannically treated by those whom he serves, and as cruelly slighted by his old Acquaintance, or to live in a State of *Dependence* upon the *Bounty*, even of the *most generous*; this is a real and great *Affliction*, a State of *continued Affliction*: But, if this Person should have a tender and weak Constitution and Spirits, that Circumstance adds great Weight to the heavy Load: And, yet, I do not despair of being able to shew that this *grievous*, or any other *more grievous* State of Trouble, may be made very tolerable to a good *Christian*, by the Aids of *Religion* and the *Grace of God*.

There are other Instances of Affliction much of the *same Kind*, tho' *subordinate* in *Degree*; but there are imaginary ones, of so slight

flight a Nature, that they do not deserve the Name of *Afflictions*.

LOSSES, no doubt, may be considered as *Evils*, but *every Evil* does not amount to an *Affliction*. Suppose, for Instance, that a Person in *Trade*, or *Merchandize*, makes a *bad Debt*, or meets with any other Loss that does not hinder him from carrying on his Business, and making a Provision for his Family suitably to their Station, I should not think such a one to be in a State of *Affliction* on Account of his *Losses*. The Case is the same in respect to Persons in *higher Life*; and if any Persons suffer Accidents of this Nature to imbitter their Lives, and make them miserable, they betray great want of *Sense*, as well as of *Religion*. Thus, a *Gentleman*, whatever *Losses* he may have met with, so long as he can live in a *genteel* manner, it does not require a large Share of *Philosophy*, much less the Patience of a *good Christian*, to be quite easy and satisfied, tho' he should be obliged to abate something in his *Equipage*, his *Table*, and other Expences. A man may live like a *Gentleman* without being drawn by six Horses, attended by as many Servants, who usually add as much to the Care and Vexation of his Life, as they do to his Grandeur, with a Wardrobe larger than any wise Man can want, with a greater Variety of Dishes of Meat, and Sorts of Wine, than is consistent with Health, and constantly accompanied,

accompanied, I was going to say, beset, by more Visitors than is consistent with rational Happiness. The Misfortune of these People is the less by reason of their being able, without any Detriment to the Community, to retire to some distant Part of the Country, and live not only comfortably, but handsomely, tho' not so sumptuously, among those who were not Witnesses of their former *greater Affluence and Grandeur*.—Indeed, if a Person has a Title of great Honour and Dignity, without an Income sufficient to support it in any reasonable manner, whether he were born under those narrow Circumstances, or reduced by unfortunate Accidents, this, I think, may be deemed a State of *Distress*; for let him retire into the most *obscure* Corner of the Kingdom, or remove into a *foreign* Country, wherever he goes, his Title will follow him, and be an expensive Burthen to him.—This, likewise, is the distressful Condition of Persons in any *publick Office*, where the *Income* is not equal to the necessary Expences attending the due Discharge of it, nor his *private Fortune* sufficient (if he quits it) to support him in a Manner suitable to his *Education*, Character, and customary Way of Life. This is very *particularly* the unhappy Lot of most of the *Clergy in Market Towns*. Besides the Mortification of not being able to live like *Gentlemen* of a *liberal Education*, and a *genteel Profession*, there is another Circumstance attending

attending their Situation *much more* mortifying to a *good* Man, in that he cannot set an Example of *Charity* and *Hospitality*, for want of which he must daily see his *Person* slighted by every *illiterate* Parishioner, who can afford to spend more Money than he can, his Doctrine and Advice set at nought, and all his Reproofs, however just and seasonable, refuted. This must be allowed to be a State of *real* and *great* Affliction; an Affliction that requires an uncommon Greatness of Mind, and an uncommon Share of God's Grace, to enable the Sufferer to behave under it with *Christian Patience*, and a *decent Spirit*; neither with *Petulance*, nor *Meanness*.

While I am upon this Subject, I cannot help recollecting the Sentiments of two very great *Prelates* of our Church. The present Bishop of *London* observed to me, very justly, that, in his Opinion, it had been better, if, instead of augmenting such a Number of small Livings in *Country Villages*, the Fund had been applied, in much larger Sums, to the Augmentation of the Vicarages in *populous Market Towns*, forasmuch as one such Living is of more Consequence to *Religion* than many of the others put together. The other great Man was Bishop *Burnet*, who shewed that he was of the same Sentiments, by making it a Rule in his Diocese to add something to those Livings, in order to give the Vicar Weight and Consequence in his Parish——
But to return. I was

I was distinguishing between *real* and *imaginary* Afflictions, and I have one or two Cases more to put.

Disappointments, as well as *Losses*, are an *Evil*, but they do not *always* partake of the *Nature* of an *Affliction*, many of them not being of *Consequence* enough to *real* Happiness, to make a Person of any Share of Understanding uneasy about them. And, yet, nothing more common than to see Persons as fretful and uneasy under the most trifling Disappointments as if they were utterly undone.

I have one general Remark to make upon *Losses* and *Disappointments*.—The *Greatness* of a *Loss* does not depend upon the *Greatness* of the *Sum* which a Person loses, but upon his *Ability*, or *Inability*, to bear it. The Loss of *Five Pounds* may be the Ruin of *one* Family, while as many *Thousands* may not hurt *another*.—So, for *Disappointments*. If a Person in *low* Circumstances be disappointed of a Thing, *small* in itself, the Disappointment may be *very great*, because his *Happiness* may depend upon the Thing which he expected; but, if another Person in *easy* Circumstances be disappointed of a *considerable Addition* to his Income, the Disappointment is a *Trifle*, because he may be happy without the Thing which his Hopes and Expectations promis'd him. His *Avarice*, or *Ambition*, creates the *Affliction*; he afflicts *himself*. Thus, again, if a *sanguine* Temper expects any thing without

good Grounds for his Hopes, he cannot properly be said to be *disappointed*, by any body but *himself*, and *he only* is answerable for his *Uneasiness*. On the other Hand, where a Person has *reasonable* Grounds to expect any thing of *real* and *great* Consequence to his *Happiness*, the Disappointment must be, *proportionably*, the more *grievous* and *afflicting*.

I shall mention only two Instances more, of *imaginary* Afflictions. A *severe* Fit of *Sickness* is an Affliction, and the Office for the Visitation of the Sick considers it as such; but every *slight Indisposition* is not so.—*Pain* is an Affliction, but not unless it be very *sharp*, and of *some Continuance*, because, otherwise, any *reasonable* Persons may be easy and enjoy themselves under it. I have no Occasion to enumerate all *Sorts* and *Degrees* of Afflictions to which Mankind are subject in this Life: I have mention'd these few Instances, in order to help the Reader to *distinguish* between *real* and *imaginary* ones, that we may not so often afflict *ourselves* by a false Estimate of Things; and, I flatter myself, that the *general* Observations which I have made may easily be applied to any *particular* Cases that may happen in the Course of our Lives, and be of some Use to such as shall think it worth while to consider, and apply them.

Having stated the Notion of *Trouble*, or *Affliction*, I shall consider how we may be *content* under them.

All

All the Troubles and Afflictions of this Life may be reduced under three general Heads.

1. Such as Men bring upon themselves, by *Vice*, or *Folly*.
2. Such as happen to them in the ordinary Course of Things.
3. Such as are brought upon them by the particular Providence of God.

1. The first Sort of Troubles are such as Men bring upon themselves, by *Vice*, or *Folly*; and these make up a great Part of the black Catalogue.—If we look into the complaining World, how many shall we find the apparent Authors of those Evils whereof they complain? How many are there that complain of *Poverty*, yet owe that to their own *Extravagance* and *Sloth*? How many complain of *Pains* and *Diseases*, and yet owe those Misfortunes to their own *Luxury*, or *Lust*? How many complain of *Enemies*, and, yet, owe those Enemies to their own *Pride* and *Contention*? How many complain of the *Desertion of Friends*, and, yet, owe that Desertion to their own *Ingratitude*, or *Indiscretion*? Of *Disgrace* and *Contempt*, which they owe to their own *unworthy Behaviour*? Of the *Undutifulness of Children*, while they owe that Undutifulness to their own *ill Example*, or *ill-judg'd Education*? Of the *Wickedness of*

Servants, while, in a great measure, they owe that great Evil to their own criminal Neglect of *Religious Duties*, especially of *Family Duty*, and *publick Worship*? Of the intolerable Evils arising from *National Weaknesses*, while they, *themselves*, are encreasing it by their *own Sins*? Or accessory, by not endeavouring to put a Stop to it? Now, if a Man has ruined his *Estate*, his *Health*, his *Reputation*, or his *Interest*, by his own ill Conduct, this, indeed, is just Matter of *Self-Condernation*, and makes his Affliction the more exceedingly afflicting, but it can afford no Pretence for any Complaints against *Providence*, or the *World*, while he only suffers the *necessary Consequence* of his *Vice* and *Folly*. Do they think that God's Goodness is obliged to interpose, in a *miraculous Manner*, to *prevent*, or *remove*, Effects produced by *natural Causes*?—But, is there, then, no Comfort to be administred to such unhappy Sufferers? Is their Condition quite forlorn? By no Means. A Man that has greatly impaired, if not quite destroyed, his Constitution, by a long Course of Indulgence in Vice, or his Estate, by Extravagance, he cannot expect to have sound Health, or Affluence, restored to him; but if he sincerely *repents* him of those Vices which brought his Misfortunes upon him, he may be assured of *Forgiveness* from God; and every Person who is in God's *Favour* may be assured of his Assistance, upon a proper Application for it, to support his

his Mind here, and of being happy hereafter; and, therefore, instead of studying how to divert their Thoughts from attending to them, such unhappy Persons cannot think too much upon them, or too often. This, indeed, is the Way to *add* to their *present* Uneasiness, but it is the Way gradually to remove it. This will give them a strong Sense of their vile Ingratitude to God, in abusing his Goodness; of their Madness and Folly, in turning his Blessings to their own Ruin. This will make them humble themselves before their offended *Maker*, and apply frequently and fervently to their *Redeemer* for the Benefits of his Death, that his most precious Blood may wash away the foul Stains of their Sins; for his Grace to soften their obdurate Hearts, to beget such an awful Dread of God's just Indignation, as may strengthen their Resolutions of making what Satisfaction they can to the Honour of his holy Laws, by the most exact Obedience during the Remainder of their Lives. To their Meditations and Devotions they should add *Fastings*, as a proper Expression of their Unworthiness to partake of the common Comforts of Life, after such a scandalous Abuse of them, and as an Assistant to their Piety and Repentance. These Acts of Humiliation will, for a considerable Time, be very painful, by exciting and keeping up very troublesome Passions, but if they have Patience to persevere in this Course, it will
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end in Peace of Conscience, and joyful Hope. This is the only Method by which Men may *learn to be content* under those Troubles and Afflictions which they have brought upon themselves by their *Vices*.

As to those Inconveniences, or Hardships, which are frequently the Consequence of such Actions as are not *directly sinful*, but only *imprudent*, or *improper*, they are not *equal* to those Troubles which are the natural Effects of many Sorts of *Vices*, and, for several Reasons, cannot be so grievous to be borne.—In the first Place, there never can be so much Room, seldom any Room at all, for the Uneasiness arising from *Remorse of Conscience*. INCONSIDERATION and INADVERTENCY, this is, generally the *worst* that they can accuse themselves of; but such Instances of *Folly* are not equal to those Actions which are *directly* and *apparently sinful*, neither can the Remembrance of them be so bitter; for two Reasons. In the first Place, there is not the same Degree of *Turpitude* in the former as there is in the latter. In the second Place, there is not the same *Consent of the Will*; on both which Accounts there cannot be the same *Self-Condemnation*. But, in many Instances, the *Impropriety* of Behaviour may not arise even from *Inadvertency*, or *Inconsideration*, but from a *natural*, or an *occasional*, Defect in the *Judgement*, or from the *Perplexity* and *Uncertainty* of the Case, which may make it very difficult

difficult for the most sensible Person to make a right Judgement how to Act. Take two Persons equal, as to their *natural* and *improv'd Understanding* and *Temper*; suppose one of them to have been always easy in his *Fortune*, and successful in his *Undertakings*; never to have been embarras'd with Difficulties, never ruffled by Disappointments, never heated by just Resentment; suppose the other to have been the Reverse of all this. Now, I ask any Person of *common Candour*, Whether it be equally easy, where the Circumstances are so widely different, always to judge right of the *prudential* Part. For these Reasons, how much soever a Person may suffer in the Opinion of the World, and from the Consequences of such erroneous (if they should be *really* erroneous) Judgements, and Impropriety of Conduct, there being no want of *Thought*, or *Care*, to judge, and act, rightly, they may bear their Sufferings the more patiently, by reason of the Consciousness of their own *Innocence*, and an Assurance that God seeth not as *Man* seeth, but will make all equitable Allowances for the Difficulty of the Case, will comfort them under their Misfortunes, and reward them hereafter for their Patience. Here, then, is a solid Foundation for *Contentment* under *this* Sort of Afflictions.

2. The next Class of *Afflictions* are such as befall us in the *ordinary Course* of Things, without

out our being any ways accessory to them, either by our *Vices*, or *Imprudence*.—Of these, no doubt, there is a great Variety; *Hereditary Distempers*; the *Death*, or *Unhappiness*, of *Relations*, and *Friends*; *Losses* and *Disappointments*, which no Degree of Human Sagacity could foresee, nor any Degree of Human Prudence and Industry prevent; *Injuries* of various Sorts from *Casualties*, and the *Wickedness* of *others*; if under any of these, or such like, Misfortunes, we *murmur*, and *fret*, this is a down-right Impeachment of *God*, for *appointing* such an Order of Things, or for not interposing, in our Behalf, to interrupt it. What good Uses we may make of such Afflictions, how far they may be turned to our Advantage, upon the whole, and how far these Considerations are rational Motives to a patient and chearful Resignation to the Divine Will, these Points will fall more properly in my Way to examine in my farther Prosecution of the Subject; at present, I have only to observe, that this *natural Order* of Things being the *Appointment* of *God*, unless we readily and quietly submit to it, we actually *rebel* against him, we throw off his *Authority* as the *Creator* and *Governor* of the World. Submit, therefore, without any Complaints, or inward Uneasiness, we *must*, or we justly provoke him to load us with more *Afflictions*, as a *Punishment* for our *Disobedience*. But there is one Consideration, which, (tho' there

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are several others) is sufficient to answer all Complaints against *Providence*, and force us to look upon the *Evils* of Life as no *Hardships* at all. *Creatures* have no *Right* to any thing from their Creator, but the Opportunity of being happy upon the *whole*, but not to any particular *Degree* of Happiness.—I will put a Case that must *silence*, if not *convince*, every Complainant. Suppose any one to be extremely unhappy under the Pressure of very great Afflictions, but that he was certain that he should not *continue* in this uneasy Situation above a *Day*, and that if he behaved under it with a patient Resignation to the Will of him who placed him in it, he should enjoy a *long* Life of *uninterrupted Felicity*. Could any one under such Circumstances think himself hardly dealt with by his Maker, only because a *short* Part of a *long* Life was a State of *Uneasiness*, when the *Remainder* was to be a State of *unmix'd Felicity*? I say, is it possible for any one in his Senses seriously to think so? yet, this is absolutely *our* Case, with regard to Afflictions *here*. This Life is but a *Part* of our Existence, not a *Day*, not an *Hour*, not a *Moment*, a *meer Point*, a *meer Nothing*, in Comparison of that *Eternity* of Existence which lies *before* us, and which, we are sure, will be an *Eternity* of inconceivable *Happiness*, unless we *forfeit* our Title to it by *Misbehaviour* during the—what shall I say?—*momentary* is a Word not strong enough for the Occasion, and yet there is no stronger

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one,

one, fully to express the *Shortness* of the *Duration* of our *present Evils*, in Comparison of *Eternity*. There are *Circumstances* (which I shall take Occasion to mention) that help mightily to enforce this Argument for *Contentment* under Afflictions, but, take the Argument as I have now stated it, and it never can be answered, without denying a *future State*. And while we have a Motive that is sufficient to induce a *rational Contentment*, let us not be so unjust to ourselves, as well as to God's *Goodness*, as to murmur and repine at his Dispensations, because the Order of Things which his *Wisdom* has thought fit to appoint, subjects us to a Variety of Evils. On the contrary, let not these *present Afflictions* serve us for an Argument against *Providence*, but for an Argument for the *Truth* and *Certainty* of *another Life*, where every Thing will be set right; and this Argument in Proof of a *future State*, drawn from the *unequal Distribution* of *Good* and *Evil* in the *present State* of Things, is unanswerable, and amounts to a *moral Certainty*. But, if it were attended with any *Doubtfulness*, we *Christians* are *infallibly* assured of it upon the unerring Testimony of *God himself* in his *written Word*. If, therefore, we complain of the *Changes* and *Chances* of this mortal Life, if we sink under the Pressure of *present Evils*, while we live under the *sure* and *certain Hope* of an *eternal* and *immutable State* of Happiness in another Life, we act
most

most *absurdly*, as well as *wickedly*, In short, we betray Want of *Faith*, or Want of *Attention*. For, if we sincerely believe, upon *rational* Grounds, (and it is our own Fault if we do not) that it is in our own Power to make ourselves inconceivably happy in another Life, as soon as the Scene of this transitory Life shall be closed, it is impossible that any one, under the Influence of this important Truth, can think himself hardly dealt with by God, let ever so many and great Calamities befall him in the ordinary Course of Things.

3. But many of those Afflictions which appear to us to be *accidental*, or the Effect of mere *natural* Causes, are the Effects of God's *particular* Providence, tho' produced in a Manner perfectly consistent with that Order of Things which he appointed at the *Creation*. The true Notion of God's GENERAL and PARTICULAR Providence is stated, with the utmost Perspicuity and Accuracy, by the very learned and ingenious Mr. *Jackson* of *Essex*, in an Appendix to his Answer to Mr. *Chubb's True Gospel*, published by Deputy *Clarke* at the *Royal Exchange*; both which Discourses I venture to recommend as *Masterpieces* of their Kind. I shall borrow a Passage, or two, from the *latter* for my Use on this Occasion, p. 254, &c. " *Creation* is that Act of God " by which he called Things into Being, or " made that to be which was not before.

" *Preservation* is that Act of God by which
 " he keeps all Things in Being and acting
 " agreeably to their several Natures. Whe-
 " ther this latter Action be different from the
 " former, or whether *Preservation* be not a
 " Sort of *continual Creation*, a sustaining and
 " keeping up what would otherwise be no-
 " thing; this is an Enquiry that we can never
 " resolve. Perhaps to *Be*, independent of
 " such sustaining, preserving power, is the
 " sole Privilege of the supreme Being, who
 " therefore takes the *incommunicable* Name of
 " I AM, or EXISTENCE; and all other Things
 " have their Existence no longer than they
 " are continually *created, sustained and pre-*
 " *served, &c.*" Therefore in Scripture it is
 said, *Coloss. i. 17. By him all Things consist, or*
subsist. Heb. i. 3. He preserveth and uphold-
eth all Things, (as at first he created all Things)
by the Word of his Power. Job xii. 10. In
his Hand is the Soul of every living Thing,
and the Breath of all Mankind. But it is ex-
 pressed still more strongly at the xviith of the
Acts, ver. 28. In HIM we LIVE and MOVE,
and HAVE OUR BEING.

" *Providence* is that Act, or those Acts, of
 " God, by which he directs and conducts all
 " the Motions in the World, and the Things
 " in it, so as best to illustrate his Attributes,
 " secure the Dependence and Trust of his
 " Creatures, and serve the various Occasions
 " of Moral Agents in their State of Proba-
 " tion,

tion, &c. When it brings about Events
by a Power not less, tho' less discernable,
without offering Violence to any natural
Agent, or without our perceiving that it
does so, this is *Providence*. As it takes in
a large Compass of Things, and conducts
them in the usual apparent Course, this is
called *general Providence*. As it respects
each *single* Thing, and accommodates that
general Conduct to its *peculiar* Circum-
stances, it is called a *particular Providence*.
When it seems to mark itself out to the
Notice of the Parties concerned, by the
Manner of the Execution, it is then called
special Providence; so that the Distinction
of *general* and *particular Providence* seems
to be not in the Thing, but in our Con-
ception of it: It is as the *Whole* is to its
Parts; and *general Providence* is made up
of an infinite Number of *particular Pro-*
vidences." Again, p. 259. "By what Me-
thods the Divine Wisdom proceeds in mak-
ing all Things in one apparently uniform
Course conspire to so many Purposes, and
constitute a beautiful Chain, extending from
the Beginning of the World to the End of
it, is quite out of our Reach to discover,
and may be our Privilege and Enjoyment,
when we arrive at an higher State of Being;
but that there is *such* a Superintendence and
perpetual Direction of the Supreme Gover-
nor of the World, will appear to be a Thing
not

“not to be question’d.” Such a *particular* and *special* Interposition of God in the Affairs of the World the Author observes to be agreeable to *Reason*, to the Nature of *God*, and the Nature of *Man*; that the Truth of the Fact is confirmed by the *Declarations* of God in his Holy Word, and by the *History* of his Proceedings in the Government of the World, as it is recorded, not only in *sacred* Writ, but also in *profane* Authors: Insomuch that this Fact was never denied by any who believed a *God* and a *Providence*. All our *publick* and *private* *Petitions* and *Thanksgivings* to God are quite foolish, if God has only put *natural* Causes into a regular Order of Working, and never interposes in the Direction of them. From this Author’s Account of *God’s Providence* we may easily conceive, that many of those Evils which *seem* to befall us in the Order of *natural Causes* are the Effects of a *particular* Interposition of the *Author* of Nature, *directing* those Causes in their Operations. I shall illustrate this Notion by an Instance, or two. Such and such Indispositions of *Body* are naturally produced by such and such *Meat* and *Drink*. In this Case *natural* Causes are left to produce their natural Effects, and, yet, they may be *guided* in their Operations. I make no doubt but God does sometimes *more directly* inflict Distempers, as well as work Cures, tho’ *imperceptably*, but, generally, he is presumed to act by the *Mediation* of *second* Causes.

Causes. As thus, we can easily conceive how his infinite Knowledge and Power can inflict a Distemper without acting *immediately* upon the Person; but we can as easily conceive how he can effect it in *another* Manner. For Instance, if a Person of such a *Constitution* eats or drinks any thing that is hurtful to him, it will *naturally* hurt him, but it may be owing to a *particular* Act of God that, by the Means of what we call *Incidents*, gave him the *Opportunity*, and *directed* his *Appetites* in the Choice of their *Objects*, without infusing into the Man any *criminal Appetites*. In this case God does not alter the *Man*, but takes him as he is, and makes use of his *Inclinations* to bring about very wise Purposes; as we may *turn the Course of a River without altering the Properties of the Water*. In this manner God makes use of the Wickedness of *Princes* as Instruments of *Punishment* to wicked Nations; as he often punished the *Jews*. So, likewise, with regard to *private* Persons, he serves his Purposes upon our *Vices*, and makes them the *Instruments* of Punishment to each other, without having any hand in our *Wickedness*. Thus, again, it is with regard to unfortunate Accidents. They are so far *Accidents* inasmuch as they were not the Effect of any *Intention* in *us*, or any *other* Person, but they might be, notwithstanding, *intended* and *effected* by the *particular Direction* of God, tho' by Ways *invisible* to *us*, and without the least Violation
of

of the Laws of *Nature*. Cases of this Nature are *infinite*, but those few Instances that I have mentioned, are sufficient to help any one's *Conception* of the *Possibility*, as there are various Arguments to prove the *Truth* and *Reality* of the Thing. And a right Notion of the *particular Interposition* and *Intendment* of Providence in our *Afflictions*, is highly requisite towards a patient and cheerful Resignation, and a profitable Use of them; for, tho' (as I observed before) it would be our indispensable Duty to bear them patiently, tho' they *were* the *necessary* Consequence of an ESTABLISHED Order of natural Causes and Effects, without any *particular Interposition* of God to direct them in their Operations, such a *stated Order* being of *Divine Appointment*; but, if I have Reason to believe that God more *immediately* sends an Affliction, I know that he sends it for some *particular Reasons* of *Wisdom* and *Goodness*, respecting *myself*, or *others*. There are many salutary Effects that Afflictions *naturally* produce, let them be of what *Nature*, or arise from what *Cause* soever, which I shall have Occasion to mention, but when we consider them as *Instruments of Punishment* in the Hands of an *angry* God, or as *Means of Improvement* in the Hands of a *tender* and *kind Father*, this Consideration directs us to be more *particular* in the Use and Application of them, and how to bear them. I am now, therefore, regularly brought to the main
Thing,

Thing, which is, to consider *Afflictions*, not barely as arising from a *stated Order of natural Causes and Effects*, but as the Effects of a *Divine Interposition* in the *Direction* of them. In the several Revelations that God has given to Mankind he has *ascertained* his own *particular Providence*, and set it beyond Doubt, or Possibility of Mistake. The *Proofs* of it are so various, that, as Mr. Jackson observes, *the only Trouble is, to select, not to search, for them. We are oppress'd with the Copiousness of the Evidence, and to set down all the Instances and Declarations to this Purpose would be to transcribe great Part of the Bible.* However, this Writer has been at the Trouble of *selecting* many of the strongest Instances; and his Account begins at p. 267 of his excellent Work. Now, if the Scriptures have so positively ascertained a *particular Providence*, it must extend to *Troubles and Afflictions*, as well as to *Blessings and Mercies*. And, therefore, when God is said to *chastise* and to *correct* us, those Passages must mean that such Chastisements and Corrections are ordered by a *particular Act* of God's governing Providence. But, this grand Truth appears farther from what the *Scripture* says concerning the *different Ends* which God intends to serve by *different Afflictions*, adapted to the *various Circumstances* of the Persons upon whom they are sent. For, if all our Afflictions were Effects *only* of the *stated Order of natural Causes*, it is impossible that all of

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them

them should be so *particularly* ADAPTED to such a *Variety* of Cases.

As Mr. *Jackson* observed, with regard to a *particular Providence*, so I may say in respect to the *Exercise* of that particular Providence in afflicting NATIONS and *private* Persons, should I cite all the Passages of *Scripture* that are to be found in Proof of it, I must transcribe great Part of the Bible. Some few, however, I shall select, because they are at the same Time a plain Proof that *Afflictions* are *often*, perhaps *generally*, brought upon us by a *particular Act* of God's Providence, and specifies the *Intent* of them. The Prophet *Jeremiab* says, that God does not *willingly* afflict us. This Expression is a *double* Proof of the Point. Like most others, it ascribes the *Effect* so *particularly* to God, as the *Cause* of it, as cannot be applied to a *permissive* Providence only, in a *stated* Course of *natural* Causes and Effects. Then, again, the Word *willingly* is a farther Proof, because it implies a *particular Design* in bringing them upon us, whereas there can be no *particular Design* in Effects produced in a *general* and *regular* Course of *natural* Causes. It implies also, that God would not afflict us if the Good of Mankind did not *force* him to do it. This he calls, elsewhere, his *strange* Work. *David* says, that God of very *Faithfulness* caused him to be troubled. The same Observations which I made upon the last Passage are equally applicable

cable to this and many others of the like Kind. In many Places *Afflictions* are said to be *Tokens* of God's *Anger*; O Lord, says the Prophet, correct me, but with *Judgment*, not in thine *Anger*. In many others they are said to be *Tokens* of his *Love*. As many as I love, says St. *John* in the *Revelations*, I rebuke and chasten. But, unless *Afflictions* be the Effects of a particular Providence, they can neither be *Tokens* of *Anger*, or *Love*, because that implies a particular *Design*, which, as I observed before, is no ways applicable to a *stated, regular* Course of *natural* Causes. I think, I have produced sufficient Proof, from these few Passages of *Scripture*, that *Afflictions* are the Effects of a particular Providence, but I shall say something farther concerning the *kind* and *merciful* *Intention* of them, which is a most rational Inducement to a *patient, chearful, and thankful* Submission to so *gracious* a Dispensation. As to those *signal* Marks of *Vengeance* that God sometimes shews, by way of *Example*, and *Terror*, they are out of the Question; but I speak of *Afflictions* in *general*, not of such *rare* Instances. When God afflicts us, as he did *David*, in his *sore Displeasure*, that he may bring us to a due Sense of our *Sins*, and to an *Amendment* of them, this, in the *Intention*, and in the *Consequence*, is an Act of *Mercy* and *Loving-kindness*, and no reasonable Matter of *Complaint*, but of *Thankfulness*. When he inflicted *Diseases*, and even *Death* itself, upon some of the *Corinthians*,

for their scandalous *Abuse* and *Profanation* of the *Sacrament*, it was, that they might receive their Punishment in *this* Life, and not be condemned with the *World* in the *NEXT*; or, as he elsewhere expresses it; *that the Spirit might be saved in the Day of the Lord Jesus*. And, is not this Dispensation infinitely more kind and merciful than if God had suffered them to go on with *Impunity* till they had filled up the *Measure of their Wickedness*, and made themselves ripe for *Eternal Destruction*? Why then, as the Prophet says, *does a living Man complain, a Man for the Punishment of his Sins*? When the Scripture speaks of Afflictions of an *inferior* kind, it styles them the *Corrections* of a *tender* and *indulgent Father*. I need only quote St. Paul, who says expressly, *that whom the Lord LOVETH he chasteneth, and scourgeth every Son whom he RECEIVETH*; that, *if we endure Chastening, God dealeth with us as with SONS*: For, says he, *what Son is he whom a wisely INDULGENT Father chasteneth not*; that *if we be WITHOUT Chastisement, whereof ALL are Partakers, then are we BASTARDS and not SONS*. By *Sons*, here, the Apostle means such *Christians* as are good in the main, and in God's Favour, but subject to *Frailties*, which *Chastisements* are the natural Means of *correcting*. To these he supposes *all Christians* to be subject; that, *without Chastisements*, which are the natural Means of *correcting* them, those *Frailties* will grow up into *grosser Vices*, and strong *Habits* of

of Vice ; and, that such Chastisements are not only the Means of correcting bad Dispositions, and preventing their Growth, but, likewise, the Means of improving our Virtues, and encreasing our future Felicity. And shall we quarrel with the Rod of Affliction, when it is the Instrument of doing us so much *substantial Good*, and an Act of *great Kindness* in God, tho' it gives us present Pain. As the Apostle says, *No Afflictions are joyous, but grievous, nevertheless, afterwards they produce the comfortable Fruits of Righteousness.* Earthly Parents often *punish* their Children to gratify their own Passions, by which Means many are ruined by being *hardened* and made *desperate* ; while others are undone by a *foolish* and *partial* Indulgence ; but we are sure that our *Heavenly Father* is a God of *infinite Wisdom* and *Goodness*, who is always disposed to consult our Happiness, and always able to judge what is best for us ; and, therefore, we may implicitly resign up ourselves to his Dispensations, however harsh and unpleasant they may seem to us. *Submission* is our truest Wisdom. Instead of *complaining*, let us *co-operate* with the gracious Intention of God's *Corrections*. While we are under them, let us narrowly examine our Hearts and Lives, in order to reform what is amiss in us. Let us implore his Blessing to *sanctify* his Corrections to our *spiritual* and *eternal* Life. There is *something*, a *great deal*, amiss in us all ; and it must be
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our own Fault if we be not the *better* for our Afflictions. I *thank* God Almighty for a pretty large Share of *Vexation*; I say, I *thank* and *blefs* God for it, being sensible that *it is good for me that I have been in Trouble*; GOOD in many Respects. I shall just mention two, or three, of the beneficial Fruits that the wisest and best of Men may reap from *Afflictions*. Want of *Consideration* is a capital Source of *Moral Evil*; and nothing so much disposes to serious Thought and Reflection as *Affliction*; to think upon God, and address ourselves to him in *Prayer*. A continued Series of *Prosperity* naturally begets a *Forgetfulness* and *Neglect* of him. A Flow of *Prosperity* begets *Worldly-mindedness* and *Voluptuousness*; inclines us to make the good Things of this Life our *Confidence*, and to become *Lovers of Pleasure more than Lovers of God*; whereas, *Adversity* naturally inclines us to raise our Affections from *earthly Enjoyments* to *heavenly Things*. *Adversity* is *apt* to *soften* and *humanize* the Soul, whereas *continued Prosperity* is *as apt* to create an *Insensibility* to the Misfortunes of others. It is very difficult for the most *humane* Disposition to have a *quick* Sense of what others endure, a *tender* and *compassionate* *Fellow-feeling*, if it never *felt* the heavy Hand of *Distress*, if it never knew what *Sorrow* of *Heart* means. Thus, *as Gold is tried in the Fire, so are acceptable Men in the Furnace of Affliction*; and, *as Silver that is tried and purified seven times, so they*
will

will come out more refined from all Drops of Sin, still *more* acceptable to the God of all Purity, and intitled to higher Degrees of Happiness in *Heaven*. Look forward, then, with the steady Eye of Faith, upon that glorious and *immortal* State, and you *cannot* think yourself *miserable*, you *must* think yourself *happy*, under those Afflictions that are but for a Moment, while you have in View that future Happiness which is inconceivably great. These, and abundance more, are the great Advantages which *every* Man, by the Grace of God, *may*, and every *wise* Man *will*, make of Afflictions, and by that Means convert them into the greatest and most lasting *Blessings*. Wherefore, thou Afflicted and Distressed, whoever thou art, *Lift up the Hands that hang down* and the *feeble Knees*. Lift up the Hands, and bend the Knees to God, in pious, in fervent, and importunate Prayer for his Grace to enable thee to bear them with Patience, and to improve them to their kindly intended Purposes, that they may *work together* for thy everlasting Salvation.

Thus it is with Regard to those Afflictions which are the Appointment of a *particular* Providence. We are sure that *they* are intended for our Benefit; neither is it his *will* that we should be afflicted at all, any farther, than his *general* Oeconomy in the Government of the *rational* world requires such a *Permission*; and whenever Troubles are suffered to fall up-
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on us in the *ordinary* course of Things, we are as sure that God will either *remove* them, or *support* us *under* them, or *reward* us *for* them, if we behave under them as we ought to do. What is it that *Infinite Knowledge*, in Conjunction with *Infinite Wisdom* and *Infinite Power*, cannot do for us? And what is it that *Infinite Goodness* is not disposed to do? What may we not expect from a *faithful Creator*, whose Motive in *creating* us was, that he might communicate Happiness? What may we not expect from a *merciful Redeemer*, who died for no other Reason than that he might rescue us from *Misery*, and purchase for us *eternal Happiness*? After such an amazing Instance of Goodness and Compassion may we not expect *lesser* Instances of it? And all other Instances are *infinitely* less.— But, if we expect God's Assistance we must procure his *Friendship* by an habitual Practice of *Piety* and *Virtue*. While we live in *Sin*, we live in *Enmity* with God; and how can his *Enemies* expect his *Favours*? — In the next Place, we must use our *own Endeavours* to *prevent* and *remove* Troubles, by *Prudence* and *Industry*. In a Time of *Sickness*, proper *Advice*, and proper *Medicines* must be used, or we have no room to hope for a *Recovery*. In a State of *Poverty* we must do what we can to help *ourselves*, or we cannot *reasonably* expect the Assistance of God, or Man. God has no where promised his Protection and Blessing to the *Sluggard*, but
has

has sent him to the *Ant* for Admonition. If we want the friendly Aid of others, we must have *Humility* enough to accept it with *Thankfulness*, or we shall neither deserve it, nor have it long. If we be too proud to be patient under the Thoughts of being obliged, we stand a very good Chance to remain impatient under *Distress*. If we be too envious to be happy while we see others happier than ourselves, we shall always have the whole World in a Confederacy against our *Happiness*, and must always be unhappy. PRIDE and ENVY are Vices that will never agree with *Contentment*. They are at an *eternal Variance*. OIL and Vinegar may, with Difficulty, be made to incorporate; but the other *Opposites*, like the *Poles*, can never be brought together. PRIDE and ENVY are the Vices that threw the *Fallen Angels* out of *Heaven*, and will for ever exclude us from having a Place there. For what should they do there? They are as inconsistent with *Contentment* in the other World, as in this. What should *Pride* do in the Presence of Beings so greatly superior in *Excellency*? In the Presence of a Being most excellent; *Excellence itself*; The Source of all *Excellency*? What should *Envy* do in a Company of blessed Spirits, where there is nothing but mutual Love and Charity, Praises and Congratulations? But, we must not only be pious and virtuous, prudent and industrious, of an humble and benevolent Disposition, but we must be careful to use no

indirect Means to help ourselves; if we do, we throw ourselves out of the Protection of God. If we trust to *Artifice* and *Cunning*, to *Diffimulation* and *Hypocrisy*, *Fraud* and *Treachery*, we forfeit our Title to his Blessing, and shall find ourselves in the Condition of the *Israelites* when they had Recourse to *Idols*, and trusted in the *Number* and *Strength* of their *Forces*, and not in the *Living God*. Many, says Soloman, *are MAN'S Devices, but the Counsel of the LORD, that shall stand*. But, if we render ourselves proper *Objects* of his Favour; if we seek him *earnestly* and *importunately* in *Prayer*; if we *trust* in him; we may absolutely *depend* upon his Assistance. And who can be *dejected*? Who can be *discontented*? that enjoys the *Light of God's Countenance*, and the *Protection of his Arm*? Have we *Enemies*? What then? Have we not *God* for our *Friend*? Are they *potent*? What then? Is not our God *omnipotent*? Are they *artful* and *malicious*? What then? If our *Ways* please HIM, he can frustrate the best laid *Designs* or *Attempts* upon us: Nay, he can make the most *malicious* *Enemies* to be at *Peace with us*. Are we *Helpless*? What then? He *can*, and *will*, raise us up *Friends* by *Ways* unseen, and the least expected. Are we upon the *Bed of Sickness* and in *Pain*? What then? He *can*, and *will*, support our *Spirits*, and infuse *Comfort* into our *Minds*. We have his *Word* for it, that he will not suffer us to be *tempted*, i. e. *tried*,
above

above what we are able, thro' his Assistance, to bear; especially if we suffer for *Righteousness Sake*.

Reader, for the Encouragement of your *Faith, trust in God*, I speak from *happy Experience*. Twice I have been upon the *Brink* of *utter Ruin*. But, I trusted in God, I implord his Help, and he *delivered me*; at a *Time*, and in a *Manner* unlooked for, and *unaccountable*, upon any other Supposition than an extraordinary Interposition of *Providence*. Thus have I been delivered *from Dangers*, and in as extraordinary a *Manner* have I been supported *under great Trouble*.—In the *Infancy* of the *Miscellany* * I had the Misfortune to break my *Leg*. I was not under so much Concern for my own Safety, as I was for the Life of my Paper, which was in very great Danger. As soon as I was put to Bed, I had Pen, Ink, and Paper; lived low; laid flat upon my Back, writing Circular Letters for a Week; and in that Week had not a Quarter of an Hour's sleep. Then came on a very strong *Fever*, which lasted nine Days. By the loosening of the Cords, I was sunk into the Bed as deep as my Arm is long, and could not be moved. In this Posture I continued for a *Month*, with very little Rest, and as little Sustenance; and yet, enjoyed such a Serenity of Mind and

* A weekly Paper that I carried on nine Years in Defence of Religion and Virtue, the Church of Universities, and the Clergy.

Strength of Spirits, that at the Month's End I wrote a Letter of *Humour* for the *Miscellany*, which was very well received; and tho' I had always been subject to Complaints in my *Back* if I laid long in that Posture, I was obliged to continue in it for three Months, and yet, never had the least Complaint, of any Sort, in those Parts. This is a most certain Fact. And if any *Infidel* can *rationaly* account for it, any other Way than by resolving it into an *extraordinary Interposition* of Providence in my Favour, I may safely promise to become his *Convert*. I mention these Instances as a thankful Acknowledgement of God's Goodness to me, and in Hopes that it may give some Comfort to others in the like Circumstances of Distress.

N. B. To all Persons in *Distress* I recommend the constant Reading the *Scriptures*; especially, the *New Testament*, the Book of *Job*, and the *Psalms*; which will give them great Comfort.

F I N I S.

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